

## Reading Minds, Taking Chances by GallifreyGod

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**Summary:**

Eleven can smell it. She doesn't know why or how, but the scent of sadness is lingering around her adoptive father like a plague. When she does figure out why, her and the group plan the best way to make two adults fall in love... and it just might work.

## Reading Minds, Taking Chances

### Author's Note:

Oh my god, this was supposed to be a drabble. Tf happened? Anyways, call your dentists because this is the fluffiest thing I've EVER written. You could fill a teddy bear with this fluff. Grab a sandwich because this is that gross sugary fluff shit your mom put on your PB sandwich in fourth grade. This shit is so fluffy you could name your dog/cat after it. This shit is so fucking fluffy, you might just die.

It's probably more fluffy to me than it is to you.

Hopper sighed as he threw his hat onto the table. Saying it had been a long day was an understatement. Crashing down on the couch, he groaned and scrubbed his face with his hands.

Eleven quietly crept out of her bedroom and plopped down on the couch next to Hopper. She couldn't help but scrunch her nose when a peculiar smell hit her.

"You smell sad." Eleven said simply. The exhausted police chief looked over at her with confusion.

"I smell *sad*? Or do I smell *bad*?" Hopper asked. He knew El was still struggling with simple English, even just mixing up words.

"Both." Eleven said, trying to hold in a giggle as Hopper glared at her. "Hey, I worked my ass off today kid. 'Bout searched over town looking for garden gnomes." Jim said with another exhausted sigh.

"You still smell sad. Why?" El asked as she turned back to her original topic. It was a sour scent that was new even to her.

"I'm not sad kiddo. I promise, you'll be the first to know if I am." Hopper said quietly, giving her a look of reassurance but she wasn't buying it.

"What happened Hopper? Why are you sad? Friends don't lie,

remember?" Eleven said with "Those Eyes." The same ones she wears when she wants to get her point across.

"I'm not sad! I went into work, I searched endlessly for gnomes, I visited Joyce, and I came home. Simple." Hopper stated as he threw his hands up in the air.

El's eyes widened at his statement. "You like Joyce." She said it as if it was written across his forehead.

"Of course I like her. She's my friend. Why would that make me sad though?" Hopper questioned honestly.

"No, you *like* Joyce. You like her the way Jonathan likes Nancy. That's why you're sad." Eleven said as she tried really hard to keep a smirk off her face.

"Absolutely not kid. I do *not* like Joyce like that. Just wipe that idea right out of your head." Hopper said as he looked at the young girl completely dumbfounded.

"When you're ready to admit it, I'll be waiting." El said as the smirk broke though. Before Hopper could get another word in she was in her bedroom.

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Hopper couldn't sleep that night. He tossed and turned to the idea that El pitched. Could he really like Joyce? They both had their own problems, lives, trauma.

Maybe he just couldn't afford to like Joyce. Hopper always *felt* like he had little to lose but he knew in his heart he had too much to lose. If Joyce didn't like him back would it ruin him? No... not she couldn't 'like him back' because he didn't like her like that to begin with!

But in the circumstance he *did* like her, he didn't know if he could survive through that pain. Losing Joyce would be like never seeing the stars in the sky again. Clouds often covered her stars, but she was strong and resilient... more than he was. She could survive life without him.

Life before Joyce was bleak and murky. He woke up, occasionally showered, took pills, drank, went to work, drank coffee, busted kids for graffiti, went home, drank, took pills, slept, and repeated. But with Joyce? He never knew when she would show up at his door or call him at work.

She kept him on his toes. She put the element of surprise back in his life after years of constant nothingness. He couldn't afford to lose that. It kept him sane while boring life drove him crazy.

Being ever so the pessimist he was, Hopper didn't even think about the positive sides. Like having someone to curl up to after a long day, having a mother for El, being able to share a dinner with a family, dancing while putting dishes away, hanging Christmas decorations with someone, midnight snacks, and giggling whispers, Friday night family movies, grocery shopping with family,.. family.

*He wouldn't even let it cross his mind.*

Because if he did... it would be like losing something he never had to begin with. Joyce wasn't his. Plain and simple.

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"We have to talk." Eleven said as she pulled a chair over to the campaign table. The boys had just finished a game of Dungeons and Dragons and now they were munching on snacks.

"About what, El?" Will asked. Whether they lived together or not, Will always considered Eleven like a sister. She spent tons of time at his house, or with the the boys in general.

"Hopper likes Joyce." El replied. The whole table shifted their glance over to her with gaping mouths. "He told you that?" Will asked, breaking the silence.

"He didn't have to. He smelled sad. It got worse when he mentioned Joyce." El continued. At this point, the boys knew better than to ask her something like "You can smell emotions?"

"If he didn't say it though, how do you know he likes her? Maybe he just had a rough day at work." Dustin added in.

"No. He likes Joyce." El said with determination. She had noticed when Hopper started spending more and more time with Joyce that he looked rather down. He must've really hit a wall if he *smelled* sad.

"So, what are we going to do about it?" Will asked with a smile beginning to beam on his face.

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Jonathan, Nancy, and Steve had been briefed on the situation. Of course, the second-hand party couldn't be left out of such a plan! They even agreed to help!

Phase I was all on Jonathan and Will, and they were as ready as ever.

"Mom, got a minute?" Jonathan asked with Will in tow. Joyce smiled and looked up from her book to see Jonathan holding a tape recorder and Will holding a piece of paper.

"Sure! What do you need?" Joyce asked cheerfully.

"I have an assignment for school about how fast the mind works. Mr. Clarke wants to see how long it could take to answer a few questions and how fast your mind responds. You up for the task?" Will asked with a beaming smile.

"Well of course! Might as well put my IQ to the test." Joyce laughed as she set her book and sat forward.

"Alright first question. Who is the Chief of Police?" Will asked as Jonathan flicked on the tape recorder.

"Hopper."

"What is your second Son's name?"

"Will."

"Whats the 21st letter of the alphabet?"

"U"

"Present tense of the word *had*?"

"Have"

"Breakfast, Lunch, -"

"Dinner"

"Length, blank, depth"

"Width"

"What rhymes with *bee*"

"Me"

"This morning, this afternoon, -?"

"Tonight"

"Symbol used in an email address?"

"At"

"4 plus 4"

"Eight."

"Thank you!" Will and Jonathan said excitedly as they ran off to Jonathan's room. Joyce furrowed her brow in suspicion before picking up her book.

"Wierd"

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Phase II was up to Jonathan. Staying up all night waiting, he deleted the parts of the tape that had Will speaking and combined them in a string message.

When four a.m. rolled around, he knew Hopper's office would be locked and the phone would ring and be left to voicemail.

When he knew Joyce was sound asleep, he snuck out of his bedroom and dialed the phone.

"This is Jim, leave a message." The voicemail had picked up. The hard part was over.

"Hopper, will, u, have, dinner, with, me, tonight, at, eight." The recording was choppy but Hopper was not a morning person, he wouldn't notice.

When the message ended, Jonathan snuck back in bed and left the rest to the others.

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Phase III was left to Nancy. The Wheeler sister could always be counted on in the romantics department.

This could be Nancy's calling. She could open a business for people who tried to put their friends on blind dates while she got the supplies!

She wandered around the supermarket trying to fill her cart up with the least expensive, best-tasting food.

The eight of them pooled their change, knowing that if the food had gone missing from the Byers' kitchen, Joyce would know something was up.

Nancy didn't have any problem with it, she couldn't help but feel her heart melt when they told her about the plan. She could see the chemistry between the Byers' mom and the Chief

Nancy had been able to afford pre-made Salisbury steak for two, boxed mashed potatoes, fresh mushrooms, and egg noodles. What she saved not buying the kool-aid the boys had begged her to buy for them, she was able to buy some fake rose petals left over from Valentine's Day.

Given that Mike could've made this meal in his sleep, she trusted that

he and El wouldn't burn down the house. She told Mike where their parents kept the spare table decorations and left them to make their meal.

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Phase IV was up to Mike and Eleven. Luckily for them, both Ted and Karen were at work and Holly was at the sitters.

"See, all you have to do is add water and microwave!" Mike said with a smile at El's amazement. He wouldn't be surprised if she was going to start trading Eggos for instant mashed potatoes.

"I've seen that stuff." El pointed to the bowl of gravy that Mike was preparing. "It comes in the dinner that Hopper makes for us." Eleven said as she stuck her nose up and laughed. She and Hopper had eaten so many TV dinners that the smell of gravy made her nauseous.

"I'm sure this will taste better. The TV dinner stuff tastes like glue." Mike laughed, making El laugh along with him.

El was fascinated with watching Mike cook. She didn't realize how little she had known outside the lab until she saw small things like adding oil to a pan or a packet of drink mix.

Mike had done most of the work, knowing the recipe like the back of his hand. He let El do the measuring, showing her how much and how to add it to the food. It was refreshing to him to see her constant fascination with the small things. Things that would stick with her forever.

Mike giggled as he pressed the gravy on his finger to the tip of her nose. He laughed even more as she crossed her eyes trying to look at her nose.

Within fifteen minutes they both had gravy all over their cheeks and nose, but just enough to still finish the dinner.

"Alright, it's finished. I'll grab the decorations while you load the food in my bike basket." Mike said as he just finished cleaning all of their mess.



With an arm full of candles, candlesticks, nice plates, and a tablecloth, he and El rode the bike to Steve's house.

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Phase V was up to Steve, Lucas, and Dustin. The rest of them were going over to Mike's house to hang out until Jonathan picked them up to watch their plan unravel.

"C'mon dipshits. We have twenty minutes before Joyce gets home." Steve called as he revved his car. The boys finished loading their bikes in his trunk and jumped into the car.

"So what are we gonna do? Put confetti and shit all around?" Dustin asked with Lucas rolling his eyes in the back seat.

"No, we're going to treat it like it's the last Valentine's Day on earth. Byers will have my ass if this goes wrong, and probably Hopper too when he finds out." Steve grumbled.

"What if they don't get together? Don't you think Hopper is gonna be crushed?" Lucas added with extra dramatics.

"That's why we're gonna do this right! Something that no woman could ever turn away. Nancy got rose petals and Wheeler nabbed some candles and stuff." Steve explained as Dustin listened carefully. He might need to know this stuff someday!

"Alright, fifteen minutes. Sinclair, you heat up the food, then help us. Henderson, you watch and learn from the master." Steve said with a cheesy smile as he fished the Byers' spare key out from under the mat.

Getting in without a problem, the boys began their project.

"No, no, no. You gotta put the petals on the floor, lugnut brain. Would you want roses in your ass?" Steve scolded as he pushed the petals off the seats.

Lucas tried to neatly place the tablecloth over the round wooden table they had moved into the living room.

The candles were lit, with extra fake flame ones leading from the door to the table. Food was steaming hot so it would be warm by the time Joyce got home. With an extra touch of wine that Steve had swiped from his house, poured and ready.

It looked like the best impromptu date they could've come up with, and it actually didn't look too bad. Jonathan had set out his cassette player with a mixtape of decently romantic music for them as well.

"Alright, get your asses in the car. We got exactly 5 minutes before they get here." Steve said as he rushed to lock the door and get the boys in the car. Will, Nancy, Jonathan, Mike, and El had their radio opened to warn Steve, Lucas, and Dustin when they saw Hopper and Joyce's cars coming.

The two teams were parked about half a mile away from each other with the house in between. They would emerge and watch from the windows of Joyce's house once everything fell together.

"We got visual on Mama-Bear. Over." Will said over the radio.

"5-0 Daddy-O is moving in from the west. 10 seconds and then gas it. Over" Lucas said as Hopper sped past them, not even realizing it was Steve and the boys.

Right at the tick of the tenth second, Steve pulled out on the road with a lead foot and followed the Chief.

As the two cars stayed behind the trees, they could see Joyce and Hopper but the two couldn't see them.

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Joyce was sitting in the car finishing her cigarette when the Hawkins Police blazer pulled in her driveway.

"Hopper?" She asked as she cranked down her window to look at him. "What are you doing here?"

Hopper stepped out of the blazer and walked to her car door. "You asked me to have dinner with you. You left a message on my machine this morning." Hopper said as he took his hat off.

"I did? What did the message say?" Joyce asked as she flicked the rest of the cigarette out the window.

"You said 'Hopper, will you have dinner with me, tonight at eight'." Hopper repeated the message verbatim, ignoring the butterflies the words gave him.

Something about those words sounded familiar but nothing clicked. Maybe she had called him in her sleep? "Hmm, alright. Let's have dinner then!" Joyce said as she stepped out of the car. She looked better these days. Everything with Will was in the past and she was healing each day. She didn't look totally destroyed all the time and she was finally eating again.

Hopper thought she looked better than ever. Her skin had color and her eyes were warming up again. She was starting to be Joyce again.

"What the..." Joyce mumbled as she stepped into her living room. The whole room smelled amazing with food and scented candles. Two glasses of wine were at each setting with a plate of steaming food. Soft music played throughout the house.

"I guess Jonathan and Nancy had a date night huh." Joyce chuckled but Hopper was both confused and awestruck. Something felt off about this.

"Dinner smells amazing. Certainly not my cooking!" Joyce laughed as she saw the untouched plate sitting on the table. Joyce turned and looked cautiously at Hopper. "I didn't do any of this."

"Jonathan? Nancy? Are you home?" Joyce called but no answer, nor could she see the 8 pairs of eyes peeking through the windows.

*"Hopper. Will. U. Have. Dinner. Width. Me. Tonight. At. Eight."*

The words echoed in Joyce's head and then it hit her. She couldn't keep the silly smile off her face as she looked down at her feet.

"Hopper, you wanna have dinner with me?" Joyce asked with the look of sudden revelation on her face which confused the hell out of Jim.

"Absolutely." He said with a grin as they sat down to the romantic setting.

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"It's working it's working!" Will squealed under his breath while the rest of them shushed him.

"I think Mrs. Byers just figured it out, shit!" Dustin commented as he covered his mouth with his hands.

"Shut it dipstick! You're gonna blow it!" Steve scolded as he punched Dustin in her arm.

"Dipstick?" El asked quietly as she turned to Mike.

"Like Mouthbreather." Mike whispered back as Nancy hushed him.

The eight of them sat and pushed each other out of the way as they watched their plan go into action.

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Joyce and Hopper started with talking about their day, gradually moving to the topic of the kids, then they just talked mindlessly. Telling stories that made the other laugh, talking about their memories of their friendship as children.

Hopper tried not to keep looking Joyce directly in the eyes but the way the candlelight flickered on her cheeks, he couldn't pull himself away from such a sight. He started to feel his heart constrict because he knew at the end of the night he would go home to an empty bed, a cold house, and the scent of sadness.

"I used to love this song. I always wanted to dance to it on my wedding day but it just never happened." Joyce said with a daydreaming look.

Who was Jim Hopper if he wasn't a man to make ballsy choices. He stood up out of his chair and held his hand out for her to take.

She looked up at him with confused puppy like eyes until she realized

he was asking her to dance. A smile began to curl on her lips as she felt him wrap his hands around her waist and sway to the music. Her wrists wrapped around his neck as she leaned her head on his chest.

Joyce could hear his heart speed up and she knew he was about to speak. "Joyce, I..." he began to speak but he was silenced when the softest lips in the world pressed directly to his. He was sure his heart stopped beating at that moment but he kissed her back until time drifted lazily on.

"Are they ever gonna come up for air?" Lucas whispered, which landed him with several punches in the shoulder.

"I would be so pissed about this if I wasn't in on this plan." Jonathan whispered.

When Joyce finally pulled back, she looked at him with swollen lips and hopeful eyes. "I really hope that's what you wanted to say."

"That and more." Hopper chuckled quietly as he continued to sway with her even though their song ended two tracks ago.

Joyce smiled contentedly as she pressed her cheek back to his chest. "Watch this," Joyce whispered.

"Kids! Whatever plan you concocted worked. Now get out of the cold!" Joyce called just loud enough to reign in the 8 voyering eyes.

Within a few seconds, the group of kids walked in cautiously with their tales between their legs.

"How'd you know?" Will asked, not bothering to hide his smile.

"It's with, not width." Joyce answered without moving from her warm spot in Hopper's arms.

"I told you!" Will shouted with laughter at his giggling older brother.

Hopper locked eyes with El who was wearing a small but hopeful smile. Hopper nodded a single time as a gesture of thanks and smiled back at her.

His daughter couldn't help but beam and pull Mike into a side hug.

"Are you just gonna stand there silently or are you gonna give us a hug?" Joyce laughed as the ten of them pulled into a warm family hug.

One of the positive things Jim could never bring his mind to think of; a family hug... a *real* family.

Fin.

**Author's Note:**

The Duffer Brothers are robbing me of my life.  
Thanks, guys, preesh.

They own these characters too.